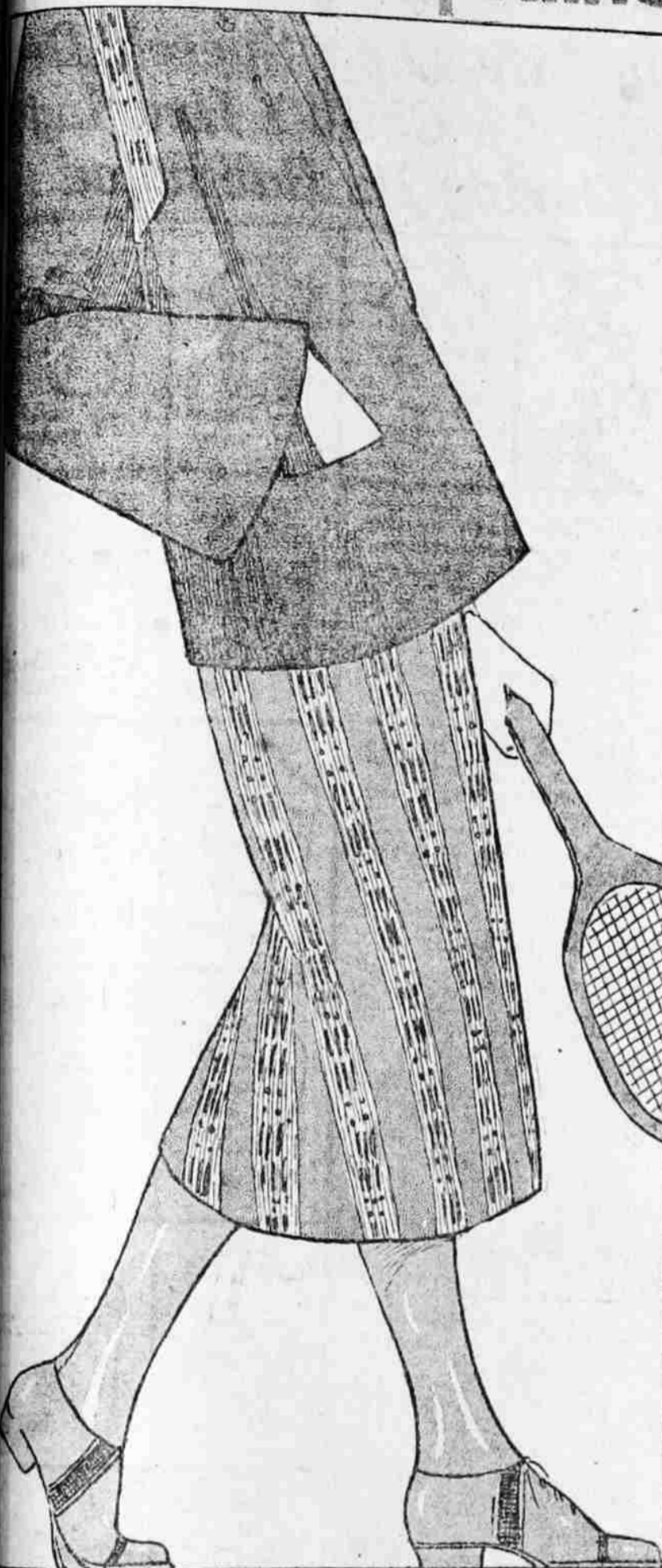


Science Explains What's Wrong With Women's Clothes



On the left, a striking example of the highly satisfactory combination of common sense, practicality and art in sport clothes; and below—a sport suit which Professor Parsons cites as typical of the inappropriateness many women show in their choice of clothing



On the left, a costume which was once thought fashionable but which Professor Parsons says is by no means necessarily beautiful; and below—the same woman dressed in a way that is a great deal less objectionable, everything considered



relieved by white. Probably this is why all men are standardized by white collars.

The old law of backgrounds is still active, and people of taste see this relationship as essential. "Backgrounds must be less intense in color than objects shown on them." Wallpapers and walls of paneled silk whose color appeal is the intensest possible are hardly a fit setting for the face and figure of an ordinary woman, even when aided by the modern vanity box. Pictures and furniture fade into insignificance and the person disappears.

Some people know that when a picture is framed with a frame stronger in appeal than the picture itself there seems to be a lack of taste either on the part of the owner or the framer. The same is true of clothes. The hat, the coat and dress, particularly for street wear, are frames for the human face and figure. No lady cares to exploit her clothes or become a special object of interest because of them. Street, shopping and church clothes should be seen only dimly and should on no account be hard.

Perhaps woman's most vulnerable point is that of hats. To consider "what the hat is for" seems never to enter the mind. It should be a protection, not an obstruction. It ought to be a consistent aggregate, and not an expression of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdom from the standpoint either of botany or zoology or affluence. There seems to be an impression that all women become paradise birds when they wear paradise feathers. This is a fallacy.

In the final analysis it comes down to this: Clothes are the most personal of all individual expressions. Therefore, they are the most important indications of taste and common sense. Women who have neither use neither. There will be no change for better or worse in matters of expression in clothes unless there is a change in the mental attitude.

Undoubtedly one of the strongest motives for all the pains and money expended on women's clothes is the appeal they are supposed to make to men. In my belief it is a mistake to think they have any such appeal.

After having carefully discussed the matter with thousands of men I have come to the conclusion that the sex is practically unanimous in thinking itself capable of deciding what it likes in a woman without having those qualities publicly expressed in her manner of dress.

Professor Parsons Shows How Ugliness Is the Result of Following Fashion's Dictates Instead of the Standards Set by Art

By Frank Alvah Parsons, B. S.
President of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art
(In an Interview)

WHY wear clothes, anyhow? There are just three legitimate reasons for the custom. First, the instinct for shelter. But the instinct is not active. If it were, man would not be putting on fur coats, binding up their heads and their bodies down to their knees and stepping out practically barelegged and barefooted in mid-winter. The second reason is found in the instinct for privacy. Eve conceived the custom. At different times in history it has been apparent in the concept of robes. But at present—well, judge for yourself. The third, and the most important of all, is the universal desire for beauty. And, strange as it may seem, practically every woman believes she is gratified that desire when she has dressed herself in accordance with the dictates of fashion. How far her instinct usually is from the truth can be seen by comparing the result with the well known principles of art. The chief trouble with women's clothes seems to be their wearers' ignorance of art and the best means of expressing it. They are too ready to believe that everything bearing the fashionable trademark is really beautiful. The squatty woman in the wide hat trimmed with vegetables, the one with high-heeled jeweled slippers with sport clothes, and the nonchalance with her waistline lowered to four inches from her knee are good examples of the way the feminine ideal is led away from true art by the dictates of fashion. To understand what's wrong with women's clothes we must first get at the fundamental meaning of art. Just what art is, and why? Art is the answer in materials to the needs. The art of the temple reached its greatest perfection among the Greeks because temples were what was needed and thought about. The

art of the salon was supreme in the eighteenth century because that was what the people wanted. In our day we must look to our movies and automobiles, telephones and radios, clothes and other features of every-day life for our art. Of all the various forms of art expression clothes are the most vital because they are the most personal. If we are to give ourselves the highest artistic expression they are the first problem that needs to be attacked. After seeing a short, wide woman wearing a broad, flat hat with a yoke dress, a colored belt, a skirt stopping at the knees and light colored stockings—the whole arrangement reminding one of nothing less than a closed concertina—the need for the attack becomes urgent. Most women do not seem to realize that to be artistic clothes must fulfill the twofold purpose of art—fitness and beauty. Fitness really is the foundation of taste, and taste is what we are accused by other nations of not having. And there is much ground for the accusation. As for beauty, we are accused—and also with reason—of not knowing it when we see it. Beauty is governed by certain definite principles. In order to make ourselves beautiful we should know the language of beauty—understand the laws that regulate its expression just as we do in the case of music and arithmetic. But the only principles underlying most women's clothes nowadays are those of fashion. These "principles," as those of fashion, are not dictated by every one knows, are dictated by greedy commercial interest. Styles are originated not because of their inherent beauty, but because they help to dispose of surplus goods or make women buy new ones. Hence the long, draped skirts that use up yards and yards of

material and make short ones useless. Fashion's great ally is the fact that everybody is governed more or less by fear. The average woman would rather take a chance on the hereafter than on being called old-fashioned. Another ally of fashion is vanity. There isn't a human being who doesn't revel in hearing some one say "Isn't she chic?" or "She had the very latest thing in a coat." Fashion knows all this, and a lot more. She never fails to exploit herself, and in doing so destroys the individual common sense of the woman in matters of taste. Fashion should be the handmaid of woman, and not woman the catpaw of fashion. In every period where there has been any great art it was usually instigated, or at least sponsored, by women. Through their clothes they inspired the art instinct, and artists began to create for them in clothes, and thus art grew. Personality is the first thing to be considered in connection with clothes. They should not only enhance it and make it more effective but also make a human being as nearly ideal in proportion as is possible under the circumstances. Any fashion that distorts human proportion is a violation of one of the fundamental principles of art. When you move the waistline four inches above the knees and emphasize it with a chain it may be fashionable, but it certainly isn't artistic. Lines—that is, directions created on the human body by plaits, insertions, hems, changes in color, etc.—are valuable in preserving the human proportion. Horizontal lines increase width and decrease height at the same time. Conversely, vertical ones increase height and decrease width.

Perhaps nothing in art is less understood than the word decoration. There are certain fundamental laws on decoration which were given by Leonardo da Vinci, and they haven't been much improved upon.

First, he says, "There must be a crying need for decoration before any decoration should be used." It would seem possible to have certain spots on the human body left blank and unadorned without any noticeable cry of pain on their part. The prevalent mode of sticking on jeweled pins, hand-embroidered panels, hair ornaments, vegetables on hats, etc., should be judged by this rule.

Second, "Decoration should never interfere with use." Shoes in which one cannot walk, dresses in which one cannot step, clothes in which one cannot breathe and hats that nobody can see past would seem to come under this law.

Third, "Decoration should follow structure." The human figure appears to be bounded by curved lines. We should follow these lines as much as it is possible to do so, without overdoing the matter, and thus be within this law. Diagonal lines from one shoulder to the other, zigzag laces, insertions and various applied trimmings whose lines seem to be struggling to find where the lines of the human body are going to—all these are inharmonious and therefore inartistic.

Fourth, "Decoration should be applied at the point of particular interest where the attention is to be directed." Can this be the reason why so many women wear white shoes with black clothes, gray stockings with dark blue dresses, huge pendants stopping at the abdomen and bright-hued stockings with clocks on them?

Color is perhaps one of the most important elements in the art language. But it is one that has been little exploited in America, except from the point of view of "what I like" or what Fashion dictates. Every tone of color has something to say which is distinctly its own.



A street hat with senseless decoration, bad line and of a type to accentuate the idiosyncrasies of the wearer's face and hair



Above, a street hat which Professor Parsons pronounces suitable in material, interesting in proportion and line

